Gingrich Vows to Remove Torricelli

Democrat Must Leave Intelligence Panel, Gephardt Told

By Dana Priest
Washington Post Staff Writer

House Speaker Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.) has told House Minority Leader Richard A. Gephardt (D-Mo.) to remove from the House intelligence committee by today the Democratic member who publicized a Guatemalan colonel's CIA ties, or Gingrich will oust him, Gephardt's office said yesterday.

Gingrich on Monday called for the resignation from the Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence of Rep. Robert G. Torricelli (D-N.J.), saying the congressman had violated his oath not to reveal classified information.

Torricelli said he obtained the information from government sources outside the committee and did not even attend hearings in which Guatemala was discussed.

Torricelli consulted with Gephardt before going public with the information and offered then to resign from the committee because he knew the disclosure would be controversial, according to a letter the New Jersey member sent Gephardt two weeks ago. Gephardt told him to go ahead with his announcement and did not ask him to resign.

Gephardt has declined to remove Torricelli, said sources in his office, and, in protest, will not name a replacement if Gingrich fulfills his threat to remove Torricelli.

"What clearly is occurring is that the CIA is reluctant to appear before this committee, knowing I will ask them about criminal activity," Torricelli said in an interview. "As a precedent, the intelligence community cannot be dictating [to] the members of this committee and that's exactly what's happening."

Torricelli said he believes that Gingrich is carrying out the CIA's wishes on this matter. He said he had no proof, but that he believes a meeting of the House intelligence committee was canceled a week ago because the CIA refused to participate if Torricelli were present.

Gingrich's spokesman, Tony Blankley, did not return calls yesterday. Earlier this week he said Torricelli's announcement had damaged the confidence the committee needs to gather information from the intelligence community.

Two weeks ago, Torricelli announced he had obtained information linking a paid CIA informant, Guatemalan army Col. Julio Roberto Alpirez, to the murders of an American innkeeper, Michael DeVine, and a Guatemalan rebel married to an American lawyer.

The allegations prompted President Clinton to order a government-wide investigation into CIA involvement in Guatemala.